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James W. Covington



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LA FLORIDE: 1565

Edited by JAMES W. COVINGTON

THE COMING of the French Huguenots to Florida in 1564 and their establishment of an outpost known as Fort Caroline proved to be a remarkable event both for Spanish imperialism and the student of Indian customs and law. When the King of Spain learned that the French had invaded land which he considered to be his own and that renegade groups had raided nearby islands, he ordered Pedro Menendez de Aviles to organize a force and expel the invaders. Part of the contract signed by Menendez included the founding of two towns in Florida. Thus, when Menendez landed in Florida he established St. Augustine, the first permanent town to be founded within the bounds of the present United States by the Europeans.

Although Fort Caroline stayed only for about one year under the control of the French, its inhabitants made some valuable observations concerning Indian life in the area. Jacques Le Moyne's paintings of Indian life are outstanding in their accuracy and have been used again and again to illustrate historical and ethnological books. Rene de Laudonniere, commander at Fort Caroline until the arrival of his superior Jean Ribault, wrote an account of his stay in Florida and encounters with the Indians. The descriptions of the way of life as followed by the Timucuan and nearby tribes have been extremely useful to the anthropologist. Another version of the activities at Fort Caroline was written by the carpenter Nicholas Le Challeux. Still another published primary source was the one related by a sailor from Dieppe who escaped from the Spanish attackers and made his way back to France. His interesting story is found in Woodbury Lowery's *The Spanish Settlements within the Present Limits of the United States. Florida, 1562-1574* (New York, 1905). Le Moyne had written a narrative to serve as background for his pictures. Unfortunately, he did not use much of his own experience but depended mostly upon the already published accounts of Laudonniere and Le Challeux.

Recently the editor visited Washington and found in the manuscript room of the Library of Congress another account of

the voyage and stay in Florida, as yet unpublished in English. The author is unknown and the French version was translated by a Mrs. H. Myers. The manuscript is titled, "Florida, 1565" by the translator and gives some facts not previously revealed by the other writers. The views concerning the Indians, wild life, and vegetation are good and probably will be of benefit both to the anthropologist and historian. This short anonymous narrative was published in Paris in 1565 and reprinted with other documents by H. Ternaux-Compans, ed., in *Recueil de pieces sur la Floride. Inedit* (Paris, 1841), and also by Paul Gaffarel in *Histoire de la Floride francaise* (Paris, 1875). This letter may have been carried back to France by the ships which departed from the little colony on July 28, 1564, leaving them without any communication with the mother country. When the Spanish under Pedro Menendez de Aviles landed and made war against the French, very few of them were fortunate enough to escape and make their way to Europe. Probably the author was killed at Matanzas or at Fort Caroline. A large number of Huguenots, however, were captured near Cape Canaveral and sentenced to work as galley slaves.

* * * *

C O P Y

of a Letter coming from Florida

Sent to Rouen

and afterwards to Seigneur D'Encron:

together

with the Plan and Drawing of the Fort which
the French have made there.

1565

My honored Father: I have arrived in this land of New France, in good prosperity and health (God be thanked), in which I pray you may also be. I have wished to take pen in hand, to write a letter, that I might give you some account of the island of Florida, called New France, and of the sort and manners of the Savages, which may it please you to take in good part, and I very humbly pray you to hold me excused in that I do not write you at greater length, as I could desire. The cause

has been our daily working upon our Fort, which is at present in a state of defense.

We left Havre the twenty second of April, under the conduct of Seigneur Rene de Landonniere a gentleman of Poicten, having charge of three ships of war. The one on which he sailed is called the *Isabeau of Hourfleur* our admiral, of which Jean Lucas of the said place is master; the other, the vice-admiral, was commanded by Captain Vasseur of Dieppe, and was named the *Petit Breton*; on this I embarked, and made the voyage; the other is called the *Faulcon*, which was sailed by Captain Pierre Marchant, all of which (with the aid of our good God whom we praise) have always sailed together with fine weather, without parting one from the other more than three leagues, so much that we can say, (thanks be to God) we have made the most fortunate voyages which were ever on the sea, seeing the great favor which God has had towards us who are poor sinners having conducted us in good prosperity, without any hindrance, with this exception, that as we were passing by the coast of England, we fell in with eighteen or twenty transports, which we took to be English, which watched us, in order to take us.¹ Having discovered them we put ourselves in battle array to receive them. We had heard before we started that the English would be watching to take us and the said transports having descried us, and seeing us with all our flags displayed, and our (*husnes bastillonnee*'s) all ready to fight, we then perceived the admiral and the vice-admiral of these transports the other vessels having first been placed in line, coming directly towards, and we towards them, at this moment we perceived they were Flemish transports to which we spoke.² They said they were going (*en brouage*) to load with salt, on which we allowed them to go, and went our way till the twenty second day of June, when we arrived in sight of New France, otherwise called Florida, where we perceived a sweet odour of

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1. The vessels were of sixty, eighty, and three hundred tons respectively; the largest being a man of war. Woodbury Lowery, *The Spanish Settlements Within the Present Limits of the United States*, II (New York, 1959), 53.
 2. Laudonniere does not mention this encounter but does tell about stops at the Canary Islands and Dominica. Rene Laudonniere, "The Second Voyage unto Florida" in Richard Hakluyt, ed., *The Voyages, traffiques and Discoveries of Foreign Voyagers*, X (New York, 1928), 40-42.

several pleasant things, because the wind came from the shore, and seeing the earth very flat, without a single mountain, very straight upon the sea, and full of fine trees and all wooded along the shore. I leave you to imagine in what joy we all might be especially when at noon we could see a beautiful river where Seigneur de Laudonniere wished to land to reconnoitre.³ He went accompanied only by twelve soldiers, and as quickly as he touched his foot to the earth, three kings appeared, with more than four hundred savages, who came to salute Seigneur Laudonniere in their manner, and flattered him as if they were adoring an image.⁴ After that was done the said kings led him a little farther, perhaps a bow-shot, to a place having a very beautiful shade of laurels, and there seated themselves altogether and made signs of being very happy at our arrival, and also made signs, (by pointing to the said Seigneur Laudonniere and the sun) saying that Seigneur Laudonniere was brother to the sun, and that he should so make war with them against their enemies whom they called Tymangona, and at the same time made us signs by three inclinations, that he was only three days journey distant. Then the said Seigneur de Laudonniere promised them he would go with them, and one after another, according to his rank, arose and thanked him. Soon after, the said Seigneur wished to go farther up the said river, and in looking over a little field of sand he saw the post of white stone, which had the arms of the king engraven upon it, which had been set there by Captain Jean Ribault of Dieppe, in the first voyage which he made.⁵ Seeing this the said Seigneur Laudonniere was well contented, and knew himself to be in the river (according to the name which the said Jean Ribault had given it on his arrival, which was on the first day of May, called from this cause the river May.) We remained near the said post for the space of half an hour, whilst the savages brought the berry of the laurel

3. The St. John's River was known to the French as the River of May.

4. Saturiba, the leader of these Indians, had met Laudonniere on Ribault's first visit there in 1562.

5. The Spanish had sent Manique de Rojas in 1564 to destroy all of the columns Ribault had erected. This one had been overlooked but all the others seem to have been destroyed. The Indians venerated it as an idol. Crowns of leaves and branches had been placed at the column and many little baskets containing grain were scattered about the base.

and their excellent beverage,⁶ and embracing the stone cried always *Tymangona*, as if they wished to say by this that they should be victorious over their enemies, whom they called Tymangona,⁷ and that the Sun had sent the said Seigneur de Laudonniere his brother, to revenge them. After he had made them some presents the said Seigneur de Laudonniere gave command to return on board, leaving the poor people crying and weeping at our departure, so much that there was one who insisted upon going in the boat, and came to sleep on board, and on Friday was sent ashore.

After having raised the anchor, and ranged the coast until Sunday, when we discovered a beautiful river into which the said Seigneur de Laudonniere sent Captain Vasseur with ten soldiers, of whom I was one. As soon as we had landed we found another king with three of his sons, and more than two hundred savages, their women and their little children. This king was very aged, and made signs to us that he had seen five generations. After that he made us to sit upon some laurel which was near him, and made us the sign of *Tymangona*, like the others; but as to the rest, they are the greatest thieves in the world, for they take as well by foot as by hand, notwithstanding they have only skins before their private parts, and all painted black, and very beautifully divided. The women had around them a certain white moss, very long, covering their breasts and their private parts, very obedient to their husbands, not thievish like the men, but very desirous of rings, ornaments and necklaces, to hang about their necks. One day having sounded the said river, and finding it in a good condition to enter with our ships, though not like that of May, so that the said Seigneur de Laudonniere having returned on board, decided with Captain Vasseur to return to the before said river May, and the Tuesday following we raised our anchor in order to return there, at which place on the Friday following we arrived, and immediately went on shore, where we were honorably received by the savages, as the first time, and they

6. The ceremonial drink was known as casina. According to one account, it strengthened the body to such an extent that it was possible to go for twenty-four hours without food or water after drinking it. The drink was made from the leaves of the holly tree.

7. According to Le Moyne, *Tymangona* meant enemy. It was one of the villages situated some distance from the St. John's River near the Oklawaha. Outina, an enemy of Saturiba, was the cacique or ruler. Outina had forty villages under his control and Saturiba had thirty.

led us to a place where at present our fort is made, which is named Caroline, because the king is Charles; of which you can see the drawing herewith.⁸

This fort is upon the said river May, about six leagues distant from the sea, and in a little time we have so well fortified it that it is placed in a state of defence, having very good conveniences, water even in the fosse of the fort. Also we found a certain china-wood, which serves greatly to increase the appetite, which is the least good that is in it, for the water that comes from it has such virtue that if a lean woman drink of it constantly for sometime, they become large and fat; it has also other good qualities.⁹ We have understood from the surgeon that it sells well in France and has been well received. The said Seigneur de Laudonniere has forbidden us soldiers sending it by the present ships, and he has only sent some as a present to the king and to the other princes of France, and to the admiral together with gold from a mine which we discovered there, but he has given us leave to furnish it for the next vessels which return here; so that with the help of God a good supply shall be laid in, for I am assured it will be very much in demand there, and in other places. The said Seigneur de Laudonniere is willing that if there be profit in it, his soldiers should share it. We have found also a certain sort of cinamon, but not good, some a little scarlet, and also rhubarb, but very little. We hope however that in time we shall be able to secure for ourselves different commodities which may here exist. Twenty-five leagues from our fort there is a river named the Jourdain, near which are found very fine skins of the water civet, to which place we hope to go with the help of God, within six weeks.¹⁰ Moreover there is very fine cedar, red as blood, and the woods are so full of it, there is, as it were, nothing else, and also many pines, and another sort of wood which is very yellow. The woods are so full of vines that you can scarcely walk two steps without finding quantities of grapes just now beginning to ripen,

8. A good sketch of the fort by Le Moyne may be seen on page 55 of Stefan Lorant, *The New World* (New York, 1946). The fort was named after Charles IX of France.

9. The French developed a fondness for sassafras tea and shipped the roots in great quantities from Florida. Boiling the water in the preparation of tea killed the germs and consequently those who drank the tea did not suffer as much as from various diseases.

10. The river Jordan was probably the Pee Dee near Cape Fear. Ayllon named it in 1526 in honor of a captain of one of his ships.

so that we hope soon to make some wine, which will be good for something. The Seigneur de Laudonniere decided fifteen days after the fortification of the fort to send two barques to Tyman-gona, and indeed on Saturday the fifteenth day of this present month, they went thither, being commanded by M. L'Antiguy and Captain Vasseur, and there remained until the eighteenth, exploring, and upon their return brought very good news, saying they had discovered the mine of gold and of silver, to which place from our fort it was about sixty leagues, if one goes by our river May.¹¹ When they arrived there they trafficked with the savages, who were in great fear, and were always upon their guard because of their neighbors, with whom they were constantly at war, as they have since shown to the said Seigneur d'Antiguy and the said Captain Vasseur. The (effect of the) arrival was such, that they left their minerals upon the edge of the water, where was put by the said Seigneur d'Antiguy some merchandise, who then made all his boats retire, which being out of sight, the said savages bringing their minerals to the place of the merchandise reassured themselves, and making signs to our people to approach, crying *Amy Thypola Panasson*, which is to say, we are brothers and friends like the fingers of one hand.¹² Seeing this the said Seigneur d'Antiguy and the Captain Vasseur approached, and were received with great ceremonies, they led them to their village, and entertained them in their fashion, which is to give them corn and water boiled with a certain herb which they use, which is very good. In short if it pleases God to give us grace to live two years longer, we hope with the aid that it will please the king to send us, to keep the said mine for him. Between this and the said time I hope to understand the customs of the said savages, who are very good people, easy to traffic with, showing by signs that they would give as much gold and silver equal the size of that which we shall give them, whether hatchets, bill-hooks, knives, or trinkets of little value.

11. In January, 1565, Vasseur explored the seacoast perhaps as far north as South Carolina.

12. Clothes, axes, knives, and other goods were traded for gold, silver, corn, beans, deerskins and pearls. The Indians had learned very early that *ami* meant friend. The Indians probably obtained the gold from streams or shallow mines in Georgia and North Carolina. It is difficult to determine from where the silver had come. The Indians may have taken it from treasure ships wrecked along the coast.

I do not wish to forget to write to you that yesterday, Friday, we took a great crocodile, a kind of lizard, but the arms like those of a man's, with joints, with five fingers on the forepaw, and four on the hind. Its skin is sent to France by those vessels which are returning. In this river we find almost nothing but crocodiles, but by throwing the seine into the water to fish, we take some of the most terrible fish that have ever been seen.

Adieu